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Caesar's household was the regular phrase for what we would call the Imperial Civil Service; it had members all over the world. The palace officials, the secretaries, the people who had charge of the imperial revenues, those who were responsible for the day-to-day administration of the empire, all these were Caesar's household" (Barclay, *The Letters To The Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*).

Those who claim it is sinful to work for the government have a big problem with this verse. The Ethiopian nobleman (Acts 8) is another example of a Christian serving in his government.

### **Cornelius**

Have you ever heard someone claim that a soldier's life-style is incompatible with that of a Christian? It makes me wonder if they have ever read the book of Acts. The first Gentile to obey the gospel was a Roman soldier named Cornelius, "a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always" (Acts 10:1-2). Peter was sent to this man to tell him the "words" he needed to hear to be saved (Acts 10:6, 22; 11:14). Read the tenth chapter of Acts. Do you see any "words" about Cornelius having to resign his military commission before he could be saved?

### **The Philippian Jailer**

One of the first men in Europe to obey the gospel was the Philippian jailer (Acts 16). Though he served the Roman government and carried a sword, Paul did not have him leave his occupation. The jailer was still on the job after his conversion (Acts 16:35-36).

### **Paul Used Roman Soldiers**


When Paul found out forty men were going to ambush him, he used over 470 Roman soldiers as bodyguards (Acts 23:12-23). Paul knew if those who sought his life tried to make

good on their threats, the soldiers would kill or imprison every one of them.

Paul told Timothy not to "share in other people's sins" (1 Tim 5:22). Friend, if it is wrong to be a soldier, it is wrong to use one. If you believe it is sinful to be a policeman, you are a hypocrite if you ever call for one to protect you or your family.

### **Conclusion**

I've had brethren try to counter these New Testament examples by asking, "Can you picture Christ wearing an army uniform and carrying an assault rifle?" I do find that hard to picture. But I cannot imagine my Lord wearing a hard-hat or a football helmet either. Does that make it a sin to be a coal miner or a football player?

I have never tried to persuade people to join the military. There are things associated with military life not conducive to godly living. But, I do not encourage men to work on offshore oil wells for the same reason. If your conscience does not allow you to join the military, then stay out. If you are in the military, then be honest in your dealings with others and "be content with your wages" (Luke 3:14). 

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"And He said to them, Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:15-21)

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# **Is It Sinful To Be A Soldier?**



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# Is It Sinful To Be A Soldier?

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Christians often find themselves in a struggle of conscience when they consider their relationship to the civil government. The Lord commands us to “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s,” but what does this involve? We know that we must pay our taxes (Rom 13:7), pray for our leaders (1 Tim 2:1-4), and refrain from speaking evil of them (Titus 3:1-2).

In Romans 13:1, we are commanded to obey civil law. John MacArthur said, “I am amazed that in spite of the clarity of this command, many people persist in disobeying it, not only in American society and culture but in others as well. Jesus never taught His people to storm the Bastille, revolt against the king, kill unjust rulers, march on city hall, barricade an administration building on campus, lead a sit-in at the president’s office, harass leaders, or violate the law.” (*The Christian and Civil Government*)

We must obey *all* civil laws whether we like them or not, with only one limitation—if the government commands us to act in a way which God has forbidden, we must “obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29) – but can a Christian enforce civil laws? What if the government goes to war? Can we fight for our government? Do we have the right to drop bombs on enemy targets?

Some brethren have posed these questions in prejudicial terms. I have noticed several articles asking, “Can a Christian kill for his government?” This is not the issue. The issue is this: does *anyone* have the right to be a soldier or a policeman? I am amazed brethren can write articles on marriage and divorce proving God has one law for all mankind, but when these same

brethren write about carnal warfare, they appear to argue Christians are under a different law than non-Christians. Consistency takes a back seat.

If it is sinful for a Christian to be a soldier, then it is sinful for anyone to serve in the military. If it is a sin for a Christian to be a police officer, then all police officers are doomed to hell. Yet, God commands the government to punish evildoers (1 Pet 2:14). The civil government is “God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil” (Rom 13:4). I have trouble understanding how some can teach the death penalty is commanded by God (and rightly so) and yet believe God damns the man who carries out the sentence for obeying this command!

Christians have no right to seek personal vengeance (Rom 12:19). God has said all vengeance belongs to Him (Rom 12:19). However, God has delegated “vengeance” to the civil government (Rom 13:4). Albert Barnes said, “When a magistrate inflicts punishment on the guilty, it is to be regarded as the act of God taking vengeance on him; and on this principle alone is it right for a judge to condemn a man to death. It is not because one man has by nature the right over the life of another, or because society has any right collectively which it does not as individuals; but because God gave life, and because he has chosen to take it away when a crime is committed, by the appointment of magistrates, and not by coming forth himself visibly to execute the laws.” (*Barnes Notes*)

Do Christians have the right to serve in the government as a soldier or a policeman? Let

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us avoid hypothetical questions and situations and answer the question by appealing to New Testament examples.

## John And The Soldiers

Multitudes came to hear John preaching in the wilderness as he prepared men for the kingdom of God. John told the Pharisees and Sadducees to “bear fruits worthy of repentance” (Matt 3:8) and instructed the people to be willing to share (Luke 3:10-11).

The tax collectors (“publicans” in the King James Version) came to be baptized by John and asked what they had to do. John did not instruct these servants of Caesar to leave their jobs but to be honest in their collections.

Soldiers also inquired to see if they had to meet any special requirements before they could be baptized. John said, “Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages” (Luke 3:14). Unfortunately, the King James Version translates the Greek verb *diaseio* with the phrase “do violence to no man.” This verb “literally means ‘shake violently.’ In those days it was a technical, legal term, meaning ‘extort money by violence’ much like our current slang expression ‘shake down’” (Earle, *Word Meanings In The New Testament*).

What a perfect time for John to tell these soldiers to leave the army; instead, he tells them to be honest and not grumble about their wages. If it is a sin for one to be a soldier, John sure missed it!

## Saints In Caesar’s Household

When Paul closed his letter to the Philippians, he said, “All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar’s household” (Phil 4:22). Who were these people? “Paul sends special greetings from the Christian brothers who are of Caesar’s household. It is important to understand this phrase rightly. It does not mean those who are of Caesar’s kith and kin.

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